

Khaled Fahmy

## MUTINY IN MEHMED ALI'S NEW *NIZAMĪ* ARMY, APRIL-MAY 1824

In April 1824, shortly after introducing conscription to round up men for his new army, Mehmed Ali, governor of Egypt for over eighteen years, faced a momentous challenge to his authority. A huge rebellion erupted in Upper Egypt and soon engulfed all villages and towns between Qus and Isne. It was led by the apparently charismatic Şeyh Ahmed, who is reported to have succeeded in rallying nearly 30,000 men and women around him in clear and daring defiance of Mehmed Ali's authority. The şeyh revealed himself to be the long-awaited *Mehdi*, declared that Mehmed Ali was an infidel, and urged his mostly peasant followers to attack the Paşa's provincial officials. Looting and arson on a large scale ensued, and in numerous towns, peasants marched into the residences of local officials, set fire to public buildings, and occasionally took officials prisoner.<sup>1</sup>

After a couple of weeks the rebellion showed no signs of abating. When it threatened to spread to villages in Middle Egypt to the north, Mehmed Ali finally decided to send some of his newly formed troops to deal decisively with the danger. This was a very serious decision, indeed, as most of the troops had been conscripted from the same villages in which they were now sent to fight. As it happened, the troops managed to quell the uprising at an enormous cost. Four thousand people were reported to have been killed in the month-long revolt that spread to the army itself, requiring severe action to stop it from engulfing more units. What follows is an investigation of this particular "mutiny" aspect of the rebellion.

Mehmed Ali, in dealing with the unprecedented challenge to his authority, evidently decided to differentiate between the peasants and the soldiers who took part in the disturbances. The peasants were seen as rebels and were punished with an equal measure of intimidation and terror, but there was an attempt to deal with the officers and soldiers who had sided with the peasants as military men who defied military authority and, therefore, had to be court-martialed.

We will trace the series of events that led to the mass rebellion in our effort to understand its causes and to see the options available to Mehmed Ali. Because the sources used below are necessarily those of Mehmed Ali and his military machine, this paper raises the methodological question of whether it is possible to "salvage" the voice of the peasant-soldier. "Can the subaltern speak?" thus is a question to be

---

1. Ma'iyya Saniyya-Turkī: S/1/48/1, letter no. 236, 7 Şaban 1239/7 April 1824. This letter and, unless stated otherwise, all subsequent archival material are from Dār al-Wathā'iq al-Qawmiyya (the Egyptian National Archives), Cairo. *Ma'iyya Saniyya*, literally "exalted entourage," refers to Mehmed Ali's cabinet.

taken literally in order to avoid viewing events from the perspective of the commanding general and inevitably reproducing his logic.

It must be stated at the outset that Mehmed Ali had faced a previous significant threat from his military forces. In August 1815, before he had begun conscripting Arabic-speaking peasants, he was confronted with a rebellion by his Albanian troops, who constituted the backbone of his military strength. Counting nearly as mercenaries within the larger Ottoman contingents that had brought them and Mehmed Ali to Egypt in 1801, the Arnauts, as they were known, were not a very orderly body of troops. They often revolted in small uprisings in the streets of Cairo, claiming their delayed pay and demanding to be returned home. They also retained their tribal structure and recognized Mehmed Ali only as a "first among equals," resisting all his attempts to impose discipline.

In August 1815 the Paşa decided to impose order on the troops and "to put their pay and expenses under an organized principle" (*rābūta ve nizām*).<sup>2</sup> Influenced by Ibrahim Ağa, who had recently arrived from Istanbul,<sup>3</sup> the Paşa gathered his Albanian soldiers in Maydan al-Rumayla at the foot of the Citadel for target exercises. For over three hours, the soldiers fired their guns in "successive volleys, making a thundery noise like the French." The following day, it was rumored that the Paşa wanted to take a count of the soldiers and "to train them according to *al-nizām al-jadīd*, copying the positions of the French. He wanted them to put on tight clothes and to change their appearance (*ughayyir shaklahum*)."<sup>4</sup>

The attempt was a complete disaster. The soldiers reluctantly complied with the Paşa's orders on the first day, only to conspire to kill him on the following night. The Paşa was informed of the plot in time to escape, but when the rebels realized that their conspiracy had been foiled, they rampaged through the streets of Cairo, looting markets and damaging property. Mehmed Ali was able to placate the merchants and the populace only by returning their stolen property or compensating them for the damages.<sup>5</sup>

As for the Albanian soldiers, Mehmed Ali decided to get rid of them, but not by massacre, the method he had used against the Mamluks four years earlier. Instead, when Sultan Mahmud II (1808-39) ordered him to fight the Wahhabis in Arabia, Mehmed Ali saw a golden opportunity to get rid of many troublesome groups, foremost among them the Albanians. During the seven-year conflict against the Wahhabis, he consequently sent wave after wave of Albanians to face their destiny in the barren deserts of Arabia.<sup>6</sup>

2. Bahr Barra, box no. 4, document no. 149, 30 Ramazan 1230/5 September 1815.

3. P.M. Hamont, *L'Égypte sous Méhémet-Ali* (Paris, 1843), II: 4.

4. 'Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti, *'Ajā'ib al-athār fī'l-tarājim wa'l-akhbār* (Cairo, 1880), IV: 222 (events of Šaban 1230).

5. Dhawāt, box no. 1, document no. 76, 1 Ramazan 1230/7 August 1815; al-Jabarti, *'Ajā'ib al-athār*, IV: 223-25; Félix Mengin, *Histoire de l'Égypte sous le gouvernement de Mohammed-Aly* (Paris, 1823), II: 49-50; J.J. Halls, *The Life and Correspondence of Henry Salt* (London, 1834), I: 445.

6. J. Heyworth-Dunne, *An Introduction to the History of Education in Modern Egypt* (London, 1938), p. 111; 'Abd al-Rahman al-Rafi'i, *'Asr Muhammad 'Alī* (Cairo, 1989), p.



Having managed to escape the Albanians' challenge by the skin of his teeth, Mehmed Ali became even more aware of how precarious his situation in Egypt was. He could not forget that he had been appointed to the lucrative *vilâyet* against the wish of Ottoman Sultan Selim III (1789-1807), who even tried to dislodge him by offering him the *vilâyet* of Salonika in 1806, only one year after his investiture as *vali* of Egypt. Nor could he forget that Mahmud II shared Selim's view that Mehmed Ali was a strong *vali* who had to be constrained if not removed. The *ferman* for Mehmed Ali to settle the menacing Wahhabi threat in Arabia, which Mahmud issued soon after his accession, was a clear attempt to embroil the *vali* in the quagmire and drain him of strength. Instead of weakening him, however, the Arabian campaign increased the fame of Mehmed Ali in the Ottoman Empire.

After capturing the Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina in January-February 1813, Mehmed Ali successfully restarted the pilgrimage, which had been suspended for a number of years. A few months later he sent a certain Latif Ağa to Istanbul to present the keys of the Holy Cities to the sultan in a clear gesture of obedience and submission, but Mahmud was not taken in. On the contrary, it was rumored that the sultan attempted to stage a palace coup to get rid of Mehmed Ali, not only giving Latif the title of paşa but also encouraging him to rebel against his master in Egypt. When Latif returned to Cairo, there were rumors that he intended to replace Mehmed Ali as *vali* of Egypt. Although the news of the conspiracy soon reached Mehmed Ali in Arabia, where he had taken personal command of his troops, he was not able to rush back because of pressing military matters. It was left to his trusted deputy Mehmed Lazoğlu (known in Egypt as Lazughli) to take personal revenge against Latif and have him beheaded at the foot of the Citadel.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, the sultan's actions had made Mehmed Ali acutely aware that he needed a stronger and more loyal military force to withstand other attempts by Istanbul to dislodge him.

Wary of conscripting local Egyptian peasants, both because of their questionable loyalty to him and because of the negative impact conscription might have on agricultural production, the Paşa set his eye on the Sudan. In 1820, two large expeditions of nearly 4,000 troops each were dispatched to Dongola and Kurdufan, but both proved disastrous. Mehmed Ali's son Ismail, who headed one of the expeditions, was inexperienced, indecisive, stubborn, and uncharismatic. His troops deserted him in a steady stream until his brutality, rashness, and impetuous nature ultimately cost him his own life. Moreover, because of the improvised manner in which the campaign was conducted and the lack of effective transportation, thousands of slaves perished before ever reaching Egypt. Even more staggering was the fact that out of a total of 20,000 slaves who finally did make it to Aswan in 1824, only 3,000 survived; the rest perished "like sheep with the rot."<sup>8</sup>

Having lost his own son and failed to raise the men required for his intended

---

121.

7. Al-Jabarti, *‘Ajā’ib al-athār*, IV: 181-83 (events of Zilhicce 1228); Sir John G. Wilkinson, *Modern Egypt and Thebes* (London, 1843), II: 534. Cf. al-Rafī‘i, *‘Asr Muhammad ‘Alī*, pp. 138-40.

8. Henry Dodwell, *The Founder of Modern Egypt* (Cambridge, 1931), pp. 64-65.

new army, Mehmed Ali realized that the Sudan campaign was a complete failure when he was informed that a large number of his Turkish-speaking officers were about to desert the campaign and return *en masse* to Egypt. He then wrote to the governor of one of the Upper Egyptian provinces that "since the Turks are members of our race and since they must be spared the trouble of being sent to remote and dangerous areas, it has become necessary to conscript around 4,000 men from Upper Egypt [to replace them]." These troops, he explained, were to be drafted for a period of three years, after which they would be given stamped certificates and allowed to return to their villages.<sup>9</sup> This regiment from Upper Egypt formed the nucleus of Mehmed Ali's army, which, in little over ten years' time, would number an impressive 130,000 troops.

One important characteristic of the new army was its ethnic composition. Arabic-speaking peasants, the bulk of the soldiery, were forcibly rounded up from their villages along the Nile, but their commanders were entirely Turkish-speaking. Strict orders prohibited the Arabic-speaking peasants from ever being promoted above the rank of *yüzbaşı*, i.e., captain. This system had a double aim. First, it was intended to attract men from all over the Ottoman world to serve under Mehmed Ali and his expanding household. Through these positions and others in the rapidly expanding civilian bureaucracy a loyal elite was being cemented around the persons of the Paşa and his family. Second, it was also aimed at preventing leaders from among the Arabic-speaking masses from challenging the Paşa's rule.

The peasants were, by far, the overwhelming majority of the Arabic-speaking masses, so it was believed crucial to keep them meek and submissive. In addition to jeopardizing agricultural production by the displacement of thousands of men, however, conscription was arming the peasantry at a time when resentment of the government's harsh policies was at its peak. By the 1820s, the Paşa had extended his monopolies to most of the staple foodstuffs as well as to several cash crops that the peasants used to cultivate and trade. As a result, the peasants were often required to grow crops that could be sold only to government warehouses at prices fixed by the Paşa and then to buy back the very crops they had grown at considerably higher prices. This system was implemented with extreme severity and harshness. Furthermore, to undertake his numerous and often ambitious public works, the Paşa had a much wider recourse to *corvée*. Peasants were not only forced to work without pay on various public works projects for longer and longer periods each year, but they also were forced to work on projects outside their village holdings and often outside their provinces altogether. As if this were not enough, to finance his various projects, the Paşa had increased the land tax to such a degree that by the 1820s the countryside had reached its upper limit.

Because the countryside could not withstand yet more pressure, the decision to conscript the peasants had repercussions that threatened Mehmed Ali's authority. Immediately after he introduced conscription to Lower Egypt in 1823, a large revolt erupted in Minufiye province, northwest of Cairo. Although conscription seemingly

---

9. Ma'iyya Saniyya-Turkî: S/1/50/2, document no. 145, 25 Cemaziyül'evvel 1237/17 February 1822.



triggered the revolt, it was just the final straw on top of the excessively high taxes and the brutal manner in which they were collected. Reports from provincial governors warned the Paşa in Cairo of massive desertion of villages if the tax collectors proved to be as diligent in Lower Egypt as they had been in Upper Egypt. The governors suggested conscription be postponed until the harvest had been gathered, and recognizing the risks of coupling forced conscription with high taxation, the Paşa agreed.<sup>10</sup> In a further concession, twenty-two villages that were growing cotton in the Delta and all the villages that were growing rice in Mansure and Gharbiye provinces were to be exempted from conscription.<sup>11</sup>

The concessions came too late. When there were additional reports of trouble in Minufiye, where peasants were refusing to pay taxes and declaring revolt (*isyan*),<sup>12</sup> Mehmed Ali responded in a prompt and decisive manner. He summoned his leading generals to a "war council" at his palace in Shubra, at the time a northerly suburb of Cairo. Arming himself with six field cannons, he then marched on the villages and subdued the revolt in less than a week.<sup>13</sup> Soon thereafter, he issued firm orders for conscription to be resumed, and eventually 700 and 936 men were rounded up from the Lower Egyptian provinces of Minufiye and Mansure, respectively.<sup>14</sup>

The revolt in Minufiye showed the Paşa just how repulsive conscription was for the peasantry. In addition, it must have brought home how heavy were his demands on the country's manpower and the essential conflict between his desire to enhance the productive capacity of the agricultural sector and his desire to raise a conscript army. Nevertheless, his deeply felt insecurity in his tenure as *vali* of Egypt made these demands necessary; once the decision to conscript the peasants was taken, there was no turning back from it. Rather, the Minufiye uprising taught him that peasant resistance was inevitable and that it could be dealt with only through brute force.

If the Minufiye uprising taught Mehmed Ali not to be lenient, the events between that uprising and a second, major one in Upper Egypt less than a year later showed him that his newly formed troops could be relied upon to quell any further disturbances. Not long after dealing with the first uprising, the Paşa discovered that he had spread himself too thin. His troops in the Sudan were still having difficulties sending back the slaves they had captured; a new uprising had erupted in Asir against his government in Arabia; then the sultan issued a new *ferman* asking him for assistance in fighting the Greek "rebels" in the Morea. Moreover, on 22 March 1824, an explosion in a powder magazine inside the Citadel killed more than 4,000

---

10. Ibid.: S/1/50/4, documents no. 46, 8 Şaban 1238/20 April 1823; no. 55, 15 Şaban 1238/27 April 1823.

11. Ibid.: S/1/50/4, document no. 50, 13 Şaban 1238/25 April 1823.

12. Ibid.: S/1/50/4, documents no. 51, 13 Şaban 1238/25 April 1823; no. 63, 21 Şaban 1238/3 May 1823.

13. Ibid.: S/1/50/4, document no. 64, 21 Şaban 1238/3 May 1823.

14. Ibid.: S/1/50/4, documents no. 72, 27 Şaban 1238/9 May 1823; no. 91, 7 Ramazan 1238/18 May 1823.

people, generating rumors that it was the work of some old Albanian and Mamluk troops who were not pleased with the Paşa's introduction of the *nizami* troops. Now the Paşa's dangerous position was being compared to that of Selim seventeen years earlier, when the sultan had attempted to get rid of the Janissaries.<sup>15</sup>

In dealing with all the challenges, the new troops emerged from their eighteen months' training to prove effective beyond all expectation.<sup>16</sup> In March 1824, there came news of an impressive victory over the Wahhabis in Asir, where a contingent of only 2,500 Egyptian infantry had defeated a Wahhabi force ten times its size.<sup>17</sup> Likewise, although the big explosion in the Citadel was regarded ominously by the French consul, a single battalion of the new troops rushed to the scene, isolated the powder magazine, and quickly brought the situation under control. Finally, the regiments dispatched to the Morea were so successful that they caused "as much alarm by defeating the Greeks as the Sultan had done by failing to do so."<sup>18</sup>

While the Paşa was receiving very encouraging news about the performance of his new troops, the event that would truly put the loyalty of those forces to the test also developed in March 1824, as a major uprising in Upper Egypt soon spread to the army itself. Like the earlier uprising in the Delta, this one was caused by excessive taxation and conscription. It might have been triggered as well by a new directive issued by the Paşa in November 1823, forbidding the new conscripts from living near their villages or engaging in any agricultural work.<sup>19</sup> Shortly afterward, conscription gangs were sent to the villages of Upper Egypt to gather the 12,000 men that Mehmed Ali and his staff officers had asked for.<sup>20</sup>

Late in March 1824, the first signs of revolt were detected near Asyut, where Şeyh Ahmed, claiming to be the *Mehdi*, surrounded himself with some 600 peasants and started attacking local officials and government storehouses. After it quickly became clear that the movement was gaining momentum, Mehmed Ali ordered one of his cavalry officers in Minye to join forces with the provincial governor of Asyut and to attack the rebels' stronghold.<sup>21</sup> Although he gave this provincial governor, Ahmed Paşa (Tahir?), *carte blanche* to deal with the rebels as he saw fit, Mehmed Ali added some general guidelines:

Since these men have followed each other blindly and taken this hateful

15. Drovetti to Chateaubriand, 30 March 1824, in Eduard Driault, ed., *L'Expédition de Crète et de Morée (1823-1828)* (Cairo, 1930), pp. 11-12.

16. For the training of the troops, see Khaled Fahmy, *All the Pasha's Men: Mehmed Ali, His Army, and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 92-97, 120-55.

17. Ma'iyya Saniyya-Turkî: S/1/50/4, document no. 327, 14 Receb 1239/15 March 1824; Driault, ed., *Expédition*, p. 10.

18. H.M.V. Temperley, *England and the Near East: The Crimea* (London, 1964), p. 53.

19. Ma'iyya Saniyya-Turkî: S/1/47/7, document no. 193, 21 Rebiülevvel 1239/25 November 1823.

20. Ibid.: S/1/48/1, document no. 192, 25 Cemaziyül'ahır 1239/26 February 1824. Another 16,000 men were to be conscripted in Lower Egypt.

21. Ibid.: S/1/47/7, document no. 291, 24 Receb 1239/25 March 1824.



path [of rebellion], they certainly must be punished. This, however, is not to be done haphazardly, nor are they all to be punished severely. Rather, you have to conduct a thorough investigation in the villages of these brigands to identify the leaders of this insurrection and to hang at village entrances those who are too old to be of use in village work so that they be an example to others....As for those younger men who might be capable of bearing arms, those you should conscript....And as for the rest, they have to be warned not to follow this path in the future.<sup>22</sup>

The climactic confrontation with the şeyh and his followers was left to Osman Bey, the colonel of one of the earliest regiments originally ordered to go to the Sudan.<sup>23</sup> As he marched southward, Osman Bey confronted one of the rebel leaders, Şeyh Rıdvan, who was a follower of Şeyh Ahmed and who had with him 3,000 infantrymen and 500 cavalrymen. On 23 March, after a fierce battle, the rebels fled to the neighboring villages, followed by Osman Bey's troops. All in all, seven battles were fought during March and April between the regular troops under Osman Bey and the rebels.<sup>24</sup> In one battle, the number of men and women with the şeyh amounted to 20,000. When the rebellion finally started to abate and the şeyh had disappeared in the desert, a cannon was placed in every urban center between İsne and Jirja and manned by artillerymen conscripted from desert bedouin rather than from the neighboring villages.<sup>25</sup>

Occurring at a time when Mehmed Ali's troops were spread over various parts of the Ottoman Empire, in Arabia, the Sudan, and Morea, the uprising near Asyut was his most important challenge since securing the *vilâyet* of Egypt. Its scale alone made it impossible to deal with as he had with the Minufiye uprising a year earlier, i.e., by sending some cavalry troops and a number of artillery pieces. Subduing a revolt of some 20,000 men and women led by a man with obvious religious zeal and charisma required sending in well-trained troops under a loyal and competent commander. Complicating matters further, however, was the fact that the newly trained regular soldiers would have to be sent to their own villages to quell the uprising. But the gamble paid off in little less than a month. In one incident, a corporal ordered to deal with people from his own village met up with his own father. Having failed to convince his father to give himself up, the son shot and killed him. Mehmed Ali, upon learning of the case, issued an order to promote the corporal to sergeant.<sup>26</sup>

Nonetheless, fire smoldered beneath the ashes,<sup>27</sup> and the uprising spread to the

22. Ibid.: S/1/47/7, document no. 306, 13 Şaban 1239/13 April 1824.

23. He struck camp for his destination in early February. Ibid.: S/1/48/1, document no. 170, 4 Cemaziyü'l'ahır 1239/5 February 1824.

24. Ibid.: S/1/48/1, document no. 242, 13 Şaban 1239/13 April 1824.

25. Ibid.: S/1/48/1, document no. 255, 25 Şaban 1239/25 April 1824.

26. Ibid.: S/1/48/1, document no. 253, 25 Şaban 1239/25 April 1824.

27. Ibid.: S/1/48/1, documents no. 263, 2 Ramazan 1239/1 May 1824; no. 268, 7 Ramazan

army itself as the soldiers apparently buckled under the unaccustomed pressures and rigorous discipline of military life. Reasons for their mutiny included delayed pay and seeing their families and folk famished by the Paşa's heavy taxes, monopoly systems, and draconian police measures.<sup>28</sup> In one incident, 700 soldiers deserted their units and joined forces with Şeyh Ahmed. Lax discipline and probable connivance on the part of some officers were also suspected.

Mehmed Ali had to order an immediate investigation. Dispatching two of his senior officials, his *kapı kethüda* (his agent in Istanbul, who had been visiting Egypt at the time) and his *silahdar*, he issued them and Osman Bey, the colonel of the regiment in question, some general directives. The investigation had to be conducted in accordance with military law, and those found guilty among the non-commissioned officers with the ranks of *başçavuş*, *çavuş*, and *bölük-emini* were to be shot in plain view of their men. Privates who had mutinied should be literally decimated: they were to stand in file, and every tenth man was to step forward and be shot. The resulting gaps were to be filled by conscripting men from the villages that the regiment would pass through on its way to the Sudan.<sup>29</sup> As a result, forty-five officers were shot in front of their men.<sup>30</sup>

On reflection, Mehmed Ali could not find anyone to blame except Osman Bey himself and his Mamluk officers.

[T]he soldiers of this regiment were the same soldiers who had endured earlier hardships in the Hijaz, during which time they set an example of discipline, obedience, and cleanliness. This was their state when they joined your regiment and...when they marched on the rebels and engaged with them in no fewer than six battles. This they did in spite of the fact that they had originally come from these same areas. Nevertheless, they did not hesitate to shoot at friends and family alike, and showed more signs of fortitude and bravery than could possibly be expected of them. But then they dared to go on a mutiny and to desert. They would not have ended in this situation if it were not for the temptations and intrigues [of the Mamluk officers] and your own laxity.<sup>31</sup>

Osman Bey was spared the worst of the Paşa's wrath. Instead, his deputy Ali Ağa was fired and replaced by an officer from another regiment. Osman Bey seems

---

1239/6 May 1824.

28. The point about pay is mentioned directly in only one letter, namely, *ibid.*, S/1/48/1, document no. 421, 17 Şevval 1239/15 June 1824, in which Mehmed Ali summarizes the events of the whole dramatic month in a letter to Mehmed Bey the *defterdar*, who had been appointed governor-general of the Sudan. For how adequate the pay was and its role, if any, in earlier incidents of desertion, see Fahmy, *All the Pasha's Men*, p. 91.

29. Ma'iyya Saniyya-Turki: S/1/48/1, document no. 273, 15 Ramazan 1239/14 May 1824.

30. *Ibid.*: S/1/47/7, document no. 331, 2 Ramazan 1239/1 May 1824.

31. *Ibid.*: S/1/48/1, document no. 277, 15 Ramazan 1239/14 May 1824.



to have received the warning, put his regiment in order, and eventually arrived at his final destination after losing some more of his men subduing yet another revolt in Halfa. Having succeeded Mehmed Bey the *defterdar* as governor-general of the Sudan, Osman Bey helped found the city of Khartoum, where he died and was buried in 1825.<sup>32</sup>

The above account has been pieced together entirely from the Ma'iyya Saniyya records housed in the Egyptian National Archives in Cairo. Of course, it would have been extremely unlikely that even one of the peasant-soldiers who were the true authors of the mutiny could read or write, let alone that his account of the dramatic events would find its way into the archives and be kept there. Moreover, the archives do not have any records of the courts-martial that we know were conducted to deal with the mutineers.<sup>33</sup> Rather, the records of the Ma'iyya Saniyya contain nothing but the letters and decrees issued from Cairo or Alexandria by Mehmed Ali himself, for the Ma'iyya was the "Exalted Viceregal Cabinet." Those documents, in turn, were based on reports forwarded to Mehmed Ali by different officers, provincial governors, and other officials. If we can judge by similar reports that the Paşa received on other occasions, the accounts of the mutiny-revolt likely were replete with expressions of appeasement, prostrations, and various attempts at twisting facts and covering up major mistakes in order to present a smooth and rosy picture of a messy situation.<sup>34</sup>

Bearing in mind that relying on the Paşa's letters and orders is problematic, we still can make two points about them. Upon first glance at their language, one is struck by the self-assured tone the Paşa assumed in dealing with the unprecedented challenge to his authority in Egypt. Mehmed Ali comes across as the confident, ever-present, omnipotent ruler he proved to be in later years. He may have been in Alexandria while the battles and insurrections were being fought out and quelled in Isne and Aswan, but it was enough for him to send dispatches via emissaries to Osman Bey. "We are sending our *silahdar* to guide you to the right path," he wrote, and, in the same breath, added, "However, we remain confident that you will look into this matter yourself and will deal with the situation according to the laws and regulations that you undoubtedly follow." The insinuations, the concealed threats, the words left unsaid would not have been lost on Osman Bey. The Paşa did not have to appear in person armed with six palace guns, as he had done when subduing the Minufiye uprising the year before; his letters, backed by the power he had recently found in his newly trained troops, now sufficed.

A self-assured tone might also have reflected the fact that Mehmed Ali was no stranger to mutiny. Indeed, his whole career might be regarded as a clever and successful mutiny against the Ottoman sultan. The Paşa was, moreover, well aware

---

32. Abdel-Rahman Zaki, "The Governors of the Sudan," *Al-Majalla al-ta'rikhiyya al-Misriyya* (*The Egyptian Historical Review*) 1 (1948): 429.

33. The archives do contain records of later courts-martial, starting with the reign of Said Paşa (1854-63).

34. For an analysis of the functioning of the bureaucracy under Mehmed Ali, see Fahmy, *All the Pasha's Men*, chapter 4.

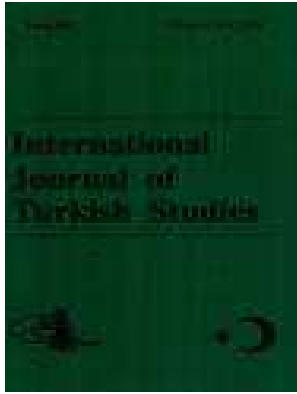
of the Janissary revolt that had deposed Sultan Selim III in 1807, and he had managed to suppress various mutinies of his own Albanian troops, including the significant one of 1815. So, in spite of the scale and alarming proportions of the mutiny of 1824, it was essentially nothing new to him. Furthermore, before he took the gamble to employ the newly trained troops to quell the initial uprising, evidence indicates, the Paşa had weighed the odds cleverly in reading the events of early 1824 to mean that the troops were reliable and trustworthy enough to withstand the pressures to which they were subjected.

The second point to be made is that the Paşa distinguished between the revolt of the peasants and the mutiny, or insurrection, among the soldiers. The term used was often the same--*isyan*--but the punishment meted out was obviously different. Peasants were to be hanged at village entrances or shot after a civilian investigation; soldiers and officers were to be decimated or shot after a court-martial in front of the battalion. As for the men themselves, who left no written records, a question remains as to which aspect of their hyphenated identity the peasant-soldiers were most likely to assume. The Paşa decided that since the men had put on his uniforms, they certainly were soldiers. One wonders, however, if putting on a military uniform would have transformed them into the obedient, docile soldiers who would not hesitate to kill their fathers when ordered to do so. It is more likely that they were Upper Egyptian peasants all the way through and that what appeared to the Paşa as an army mutiny was for them still a peasant revolt, dangerous and risky though this surely was.

*New York University*



## COPYRIGHT INFORMATION



**Author:** Fahmy, Khaled

**Title:** Mutiny in Mehmed Ali's new Nizamî army, April-May 1824

**Source:** Int J Turk Stud 8 no1/2 Spr 2002 p. 129-38

**ISSN:** 0272-7919

**Publisher:** International Journal of Turkish Studies

The magazine publisher is the copyright holder of this article and it is reproduced with permission. Further reproduction of this article in violation of the copyright is prohibited. To contact the publisher: <http://www.wisc.edu/>

This article may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.